



A team led by Dr Garba M Ashir of the University of Maiduguri receives grant for research to understand the low utilisation of nutrition services in Yobe state

In January 2016, a team led by Dr Garba M Ashir of the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital received a grant for new research to understand the demand-side barriers which prevent mothers with young children from accessing nutritional services. The grant was awarded by ORIE, a DFID-funded consortium of UK and Nigerian organisations [<http://www.heart-resources.org/tag/orie/>]. ORIE (Operations Research and Impact Evaluation) undertakes nutrition research and evaluation to generate evidence on the operationalisation, cost-effectiveness and impact of a major DFID-funded six-year programme to implement and scale-up nutrition interventions in Northern Nigeria, called WINNN (Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria) [<http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-201874/>]. ORIE also invests in strengthening the capacity of nutrition researchers working in Northern Nigeria, by providing funding to enable researchers to design and undertake their own research project with the ongoing support and guidance of a group of experienced international researchers. The team was one of four successful applicants in a competitive bidding process in late 2014, which attracted thirty-three applications.

The project will generate valuable research findings on the low utilisation of nutrition services

The Nigerian government has introduced or strengthened the nutrition-specific interventions on offer within healthcare provision in recent years in order to tackle the high levels of malnutrition in the country. These include the bi-annual Maternal, Newborn and

Child Health Weeks (MNCHW) campaign, counselling to improve infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF), growth monitoring, and community management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM). These services have yet to make any significant impact in reducing the high levels of maternal and child undernutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies, particularly in the Northern states of the country. One reason is the low uptake of services.

The Maiduguri team will use a mixed methods study to explore the demand-side barriers to service utilisation and propose ways to improve two nutrition interventions – MNCHW and IYCF counselling – in ways which can increase uptake. Interviews with key informants and focus group discussions with mothers, fathers and grandmothers of children aged 0-23 months will be used to understand the differences between households that do and don't currently use the available nutrition services. Important factors may include awareness and understanding of the benefits of nutrition services, inaccessibility due to distance from health facilities and the difficulty paying for associated travel, and/or dissatisfaction with key aspects of service delivery such as stockouts, long waiting times, or the behaviour of health workers. The team will also hold a workshop with a variety of social actors which have traction in local communities – including community and religious leaders, civil society organisations and faith groups – to explore how they may be engaged to encourage families to use nutritional services.

The study will be undertaken in Yobe state, but will generate findings that can be used across similar settings in the Northern states.

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Context-specific evidence like this, generated by high quality research, is essential to underpin the Scaling-up Nutrition agenda in Nigeria. Uptake of the study's findings at policy and programme level is assured by the involvement of key federal-level nutrition policymakers in all stages of the study.

The team will use a targeted dissemination strategy to ensure that the research findings are widely communicated. The dissemination plan includes activities targeted at three kinds of audiences: (1) local communities through health facility committees; (2) policymakers, healthcare workers, nutrition officers and other key stakeholders, through validation and dissemination workshops; and (3) the scientific community, via presentations at scientific conferences and at least one article in a peer-reviewed journal.

Developing new research skills

The grant is accompanied by support activities, including ongoing informal support and guidance and formal training provided by ORIE's researchers. These support activities are designed to strengthen data collection and analysis and to provide a forum for trouble-shooting as and when problems arise. The formal programme includes training in qualitative and quantitative research methods, the use of specialised software packages for data analysis, and general research skills such as writing grant applications and scientific papers, and using electronic literature.



Members of the Maiduguri team.

ORIE and WINNN

ORIE is an independent component of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) funded Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme. WINNN is working to improve the nutritional status of 6.2 million children under five years of age in five states of northern Nigeria. ORIE is carrying out research to determine the impact of WINNN and generate important research on key evidence gaps regarding solutions to undernutrition in northern Nigeria.

The team

The team is composed of academics and policymakers from Abuja and several Nigerian states. Dr Garba M Ashir, consultant/associate professor of paediatrics at the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital/ University of Maiduguri, is the Principal Investigator. The other core team members are: Mrs Chinwe Ezeife (Department of Community Health Services, National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Abuja), Dr Chris Osa Isokpunwu (Nutrition Division, Federal Ministry of Health), Dr H. Eme Ichoku (Department of Economics, University of Nigeria, Enugu State), and Dr Bukar M Lawan (Department of Paediatrics, University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital). Please direct any queries about the research to Dr Ashir at ashirugarba10@gmail.com. For more information on ORIE please contact Dr. Vincent Ahonsi at vincent.ahonsi@orie-ng.org.

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